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SUBJECT: WHAT NEXT FOR ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA? THE VIEW FROM
ADDIS ABABA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

Introduction

¶1. (S/NF) In response to a tasking by Acting Assistant Secretary for Africa Phil Carter, Embassy Addis Ababa offers its perspective on where things stand in Somalia, particularly with regard to Ethiopia's future involvement, and where they might go next. While predicting anything in Somali politics is a practice fraught with peril, we nevertheless offer this analysis in response to Acting A/S Carter's request.

Somalia's Future Remains Uncertain

¶2. (S/NF) The ENDF withdrawal, followed by the election of a Hawiye president, Sheikh Sharif, who has the potential to increase support for the Transitional Federal Government/Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (TFG/ARS) "unity" government among larger elements of the Hawiye clan, gives rise to the hope that the country has turned a corner, and that the worst of the violence is over. Certainly, the opportunity for better conditions in Somalia is again at hand if the Somalis decide to take it, with help from the international community, or the United States. Still, we caution that the ability of the international community to influence the process in a positive fashion is limited. A quick survey of the dynamics in Somalia today calls into question just how much hope we can reasonably assume as there are a number of key factors that threaten to undermine the TFG, and more likely, continue the status quo of civil war, with a strong probability of fueling an increase in fighting over the next several years. Although, it might be too easy to predict more violence in Somalia, it is also too easy to ascribe all of the recent fighting in Somalia to the two-year Ethiopian military intervention. Al-Shabaab no longer has the Ethiopian card to play, but the struggle for power among the different groups and clans in Somalia remains as real as ever. Some of the more critical dynamics to watch include the following.

--The TFG/ARS "unity" government remains a government on paper only with no functioning ministries, no standing military (only a handful of police and security forces), no real ability to provide for its own security, or ability to defeat the extremists. Rather, its former seat, Baidoa fell to hostile forces within hours of the Ethiopian withdrawal, and Sheikh Sharif's early February return to Mogadishu as president was facilitated primarily by friendly Hawiye

militias who are not under the government's direct control, and who could turn on the TFG with little warning. The TFG Joint Security Force remains an unrealized goal, and we would expect that at best this force will only be capable of providing a static defense of government facilities.

--In the words of UN Special Envoy for Somalia Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, Sheikh Sharif "is a young inexperienced school teacher" with no particular qualifications for or experience with governance, and who "has no real understanding of how the western world works." Whether Sharif is truly a pragmatist to the point of abandoning his extremist background once and for all, as many observers have concluded remains, in our view, an open question.

--With the perceived ascendancy of the Hawiye to political power for the first time in Somali history, the non-Hawiye clans, most importantly many Darood, are beginning to express concerns fearing Hawiye retribution for past offenses. Significant participation from the non-Hawiye clans probably will depend in large part on how genuinely inclusive Sheikh Sharif is in the formation and operation of his government. The TFG's predecessor, the Transitional National Government (TNG) failed because the Darood, with Ethiopian backing, felt excluded and saw it as a Hawiye government.

--Al-Shabaab and the other extremist factions in central and southern Somalia remain outside the political process and have vowed to continue fighting in spite of Sheikh Sharif's election. While al-Shabaab does not appear to be capable of taking control of Somalia, as of yet there is no other power

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in Somalia capable of finally defeating al-Shabaab, suggesting that the status quo is sure to continue for some time.

--It is becoming increasingly likely that in the coming weeks and months a number of prominent personalities associated with al-Shabaab, a U.S. designated terrorist organization, may "reconcile" with Sheikh Sharif and take positions within the TFG/ARS. Such a move risks alienating key constituencies within Somalia, as well as the Ethiopian government.

--Fighting between al-Shabaab and the Alhu Sunnah Wala Jama (ASWJ), an emerging dynamic in recent months that is taking on the appearance of a religious civil war co-mingled with clan infighting, is also occurring outside the political process. ASWJ does not speak with one voice, making a determination of its political aspirations difficult, but ASWJ leaders associated with the fighters in Galguduud view Sheikh Sharif as little different than al-Shabaab, and claim to have no interest in the TFG. They have vowed to continue fighting the extremists irrespective of what happens with the TFG. Nevertheless, we have much to learn about this group including how much support they have from the population, and the exact nature of the relationship between ASWJ religious leaders and the militias they are supporting.

Implications for AMISOM

13. (S/NF) The potential consequences for AMISOM of the ENDF's withdrawal, and of a deterioration of security in Mogadishu, are severe, and warrant consideration of contingency planning in a worst case scenario whereby the peacekeepers are forced to evacuate. Until the ENDF left, Ethiopian commanders were providing AMISOM with security, a quick reaction capability when AMISOM was ambushed, and tactical intelligence of imminent attacks. AMISOM is now blind, has no capability to fulfill its mandate, and is largely restricted to its bases out of safety concerns except for a few limited areas in Mogadishu. The force continues to be attacked on a near daily basis, and in the previous weeks the attacks have included roadside bombs, mortars, suicide bombings, and direct assaults by al-Shabaab fighters. Prime

Minister Meles and the leadership of the African Union have placed the responsibility for AMISOM's security squarely on Washington's shoulders. It is the view of Meles and the AU leadership, that AMISOM would have withdrawn from Somalia with the Ethiopians if it had not been for U.S. pressure to stay, and promises of support for additional battalions.

Ethiopia Will Remain a Player in Somalia

¶4. (S/NF) No matter what happens in Somalia, we expect that Ethiopia's national security interests will continue to drive its involvement in Somali affairs despite having withdrawn its forces in late January. Ethiopia's goal in Somalia since the rise of the Islamic Courts in 2005 has not changed, and that has been to deny the extremists from gaining political power in, or broad-based haven from which to launch attacks on Ethiopian interests from, Somalia by whatever means necessary. As Prime Minister Meles has repeatedly told us, he can live with extremists in Somalia, but not a Somalia controlled by extremists. Senior Ethiopian civilian and military officials have said that their military strategy post-withdrawal will be to station increased numbers of troops along the Somali border to guard against infiltration, while reserving the right to raid in and out of Somalia as they deem necessary "to keep al-Shabaab off balance." We are already seeing this strategy manifest itself with more troops on the border and the early February incursion by Ethiopian forces. At the same time, the Ethiopian military has continued its long-standing practice of providing arms, ammunition, and intelligence to proxies who will fight al-Shabaab. Our Ethiopian and Somali contacts confirm that the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has been providing support to Barre Hirale's militia, some Rahanweyn militias, and more recently to ASWJ militias in Galguduud. Ethiopia is also stepping up its engagement with Somaliland and Puntland to try and contain the extremists.

¶5. (S/NF) Ethiopia's political goals in Somalia are likely

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to remain subordinate to its security interests. We assess that Ethiopia will not tolerate a strong and forceful government in Somalia that would be able to pose a security threat to Ethiopia again. Similarly, we believe that Ethiopia understands that Somalia would never accept a Somali government that is a puppet of Ethiopia. As such, we assess that Ethiopia's political goals in Somalia are to have a stable and viable government over which Ethiopia has some influence, but which cannot pose a threat to Ethiopia. Regarding its political involvement in Somalia, Ethiopia most likely will give lip service to the TFG, but in practical terms our interactions with Ethiopian officials over the previous several months suggests that the Ethiopian government has largely given up on the TFG with the late-2008 leadership impasse after nearly two years of elevated and intense, behind the scenes involvement. In the view of one Ethiopian official, they "have been burned too many times by Somali political promises," referring to Meles' repeated attempts to force former President Abdullahi Yusuf and former Prime Ministers Mohammed Gedi and Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde" to work together, including by bringing them to Addis Ababa to sign agreements that were never honored. Prime Minister Meles appears to have lost faith in the ability of TFG leaders, old or new, to establish an effective government that is capable of restoring stability to Somalia or, at the very least, stand up to al-Shabaab, and is tired of the incessant and violent clan struggles for power. However, Ethiopia's security operations will have a potentially negative impact on the political environment, intended or otherwise, not the least of which is its support to groups that are outside of, and potentially hostile to, the TFG. Should the new unity government under Sheikh Sharif tolerate anti-Ethiopian activities from among its own members, or accommodate al-Shabaab, Ethiopia could easily turn against the TFG as it did in 2000-2001 with its predecessor the

Hawiye led Transitional National Government (TNG) that consequently never got off the ground.

Moving Forward with Ethiopia as a Partner on Somalia

¶6. (S/NF) However one views the net impact of Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia, Ethiopia will continue to be a major player with the potential to act as a positive force or act as a spoiler. Pushing Ethiopia to act positively in step with U.S. policy will not be an easy task because the Ethiopian government in the last year has moved further out of synch with Washington to the point where Prime Minister Meles and his senior officials no longer listen to, and instead are openly scornful and dismissive of, any U.S. perspective on the subject. As one senior MFA official told the Ambassador recently, "the only thing the United States did right on Somalia in the last five years was support the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission, but it took you too long." While Meles and company are seemingly blind to their own mistakes, not the least of which is getting stuck in Somalia for two years when they intended to stay only a few weeks, they now blame Washington for the current state of affairs, including for the rise of the Islamic Courts in 2005.

¶7. (S/NF) In our view, moving forward with Ethiopia on Somalia will require hard work, patience, and a clear articulation from Washington on where we want to go, and how Ethiopia fits into that picture. At the same time, a strong message to Meles may also be necessary should his actions appear to be undermining U.S. efforts to establish a national government in Somalia.

Comment

¶8. (S/NF) Our view is not designed to dissuade Washington from engagement on Somalia, on the contrary we think a coordinated inter-agency, comprehensive, long-term, broad-based regional approach to the crisis that aligns both our counterterrorism interests with our efforts to support the emergence of a democratic Somali national government is long overdue. If the interagency does endorse such a strong U.S. role in supporting the re-emergence of stability, security, and governance in Somalia, the USG must also make available adequate resources to play that role. We cannot help stabilize Somalia on the cheap or with bureaucratic red

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tape preventing us from acting quickly to seize opportunities. We should also understand going in that despite our best efforts, the experiment may not work. Certainly, sustained and extensive support from the international community, and the United States, to the Somali political process, whether through the TFG or some future hybrid, will be a critical factor in the success or failure of the Somali government, but at the end of the day, the international community cannot care more about the political process than the Somalis to make the experiment work. Whether the Somalis will take this opportunity remains to be seen. Despite the odds, Embassy Addis Ababa is ready and willing, in cooperation with our regional and international partners, to move forward in advancing stability and democracy in Somalia. End Comment.

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